



With dual-earner couples making up more than half of married couples in the United States, men are playing a more active role in raising their children. Since the mid-1960s, there has been a tripling of time fathers devote to child care.

For Couples, Family Roles are Changing

By ELIZABETH KELLEHER

As women's earnings boost household income, men pitch in more at home.

Dual-earner couples, in which both the wife and husband hold paying jobs, make up more than half of married couples in the United States, and their share of all couples is expected to increase in the next decade. Although dual-earner couples have bolstered family incomes, they also have had to find creative ways to nurture family life.

The U.S. Labor Department reports that, in 57 percent of married couples, husbands and wives work. Coping with two jobs and rearing children leaves many couples, such as Michael Goldstein and Joanne Pratt, hard-pressed to find time together.

Goldstein and Pratt work full-time at adjacent schools in Massachusetts: Goldstein teaches finance at Babson College, and Pratt, biology at Olin College. The couple juggles class schedules to care for their 6-year-old daughter, but work affects their relationship, too, because Pratt has to spend many hours in the lab. "It's been a long-time frustration that I have no clue what she does," Goldstein says.

So in January, Pratt organized a week-long biology course for faculty and included her husband. It was a way to spend time together, she said, and she learned that Goldstein has a "natural aptitude for sciences."

Experts say the share of dual-earner couples will increase. Wives' incomes help maintain living standards, says David Cross, director of Market Outlook, an economic adviser to manufacturers and retailers. Although surveys of college women point to their desire to stay home when they eventually have children, "the

economics won't work for the vast majority," he says.

In 1979, women who worked full-time earned 63 percent as much as their male counterparts. By 2006, they earned 81 percent of what men earned. The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that since the early 1980s, the largest narrowing in this "wage gap" among member countries occurred in the United States. The 30-member OECD represents most of the world's industrialized nations.

Wives' earnings contribute 35 percent of family income in the United States, and in one-third of dual-earning couples, the wife brings home the bigger paycheck.

Men are changing diapers

As women's earnings have bolstered family income, men's behavior has changed.

According to the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, men do seven hours of housework per week, double what they did in 1968. (Women still put in many more hours of housework than do men.)

Since the mid-1960s, there has been a tripling of time fathers devote to child care, says Suzanne Bianchi, a University of Maryland sociologist and co-author of *Changing Rhythms of American Family Life*. "Men married to employed wives really are doing basics—feeding, bathing, taking [children] to the doctor," she says.

When Sarah Crawford, a Washington attorney, had a baby, she took four months of unpaid leave before returning to work. Then her husband, David Uy, took leave



DONNA McWILLIAM © AP/WIDE



WILL KINCAID © AP/WIDE

Mother's Day

In the United States, Mother's Day has been celebrated on the second Sunday in May as an official holiday since 1915, though the idea of "Mothering Sunday" had been brought to America by immigrants from England, where it began in the 18th century as a day for household servants to visit their mothers.

Its establishment as an American holiday is due largely to the perseverance and love of one daughter, Anna Jarvis. Her mother had provided strength and support as the family made their home in West Virginia and before that, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where her father served as a church minister. As a girl, Anna had helped her mother take care of the garden, mostly filled with white carnations, her mother's favorite flower. When her mother died on May 5, 1905, Anna encouraged her church minister in West Virginia to give a sermon in her mother's memory. On the same Sunday, back home in Philadelphia, the minister at the family's church honored Mrs. Jarvis and all mothers with a special Mother's Day



© Creative/Getty Images

service.

Mother's Day sermons and honoring of mothers during church services have since become part of the tradition for many Americans. Another tradition is that children often serve their mothers breakfast in bed. Gifts, elaborate greeting cards and flowers—often the official Mother's Day flower, carnations—are presented by both young and grown-up children. This is the busiest day of the year for American restaurants: on her special day, family members do not want Mom to cook dinner!

Anna Jarvis' campaign extended, however, beyond church and home. She wrote to members of the U.S. Congress, asking them to set aside a day to honor mothers. In 1910, the governor of West Virginia proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day and a year later every state in the union celebrated it.

Father's Day

The United States is one of the few countries in the world with an official day on which fathers are honored by their children. On the third Sunday in June, fathers all across the United States are given presents, treated to dinner or otherwise made to feel special.

The origin of Father's Day is not clear. Some say that it began with a church service in West Virginia in 1908.

The president of the Chicago branch of the Lions' Club, Harry Meek, is said to have celebrated the first Father's Day with his organization in 1915; and the day that they chose was the third Sunday in June, the closest date to Meek's own birthday!

The strongest promoter of the holiday was Mrs. Bruce John Dodd of Spokane, Washington state, who felt she had an outstanding father. He was a veteran of the Civil War. His wife had died young, and he had raised six children.

In 1909, Mrs. Dodd approached her church minister and others in Spokane about having a church service dedicated to fathers on June 5, her father's

birthday. That date was too soon for her minister to prepare the service, so he spoke two weeks later on June 19th. From then on, the state of Washington celebrated the third Sunday in June as Father's Day.

States and organizations began lobbying Congress to declare an annual Father's Day in 1916, but it was not until 1924 that President Calvin Coolidge made it a national event to "establish more intimate relations between fathers and their children and to impress upon fathers the full measure of their obligations."



© Creative/Getty Images

to watch the baby. He found he could do some work at home while caring for his son, so he quit his full-time job and spent a year caring for the baby while starting a home-based advertising consultancy.

But as Uy gained clients, he needed help. He used the "DC Urban Moms" Internet site to find a babysitter. "I really enjoyed being home with the baby. Handing him over to a nanny was not easy," Uy says.

Today, he takes his toddler two blocks to the nanny. "My daily commute is a red-wagon ride," he says.

Family leave programs

The U.S. Labor Department reports that men are more likely to use flexible work schedules than women. Many men are "feeling a crunch," Bianchi says, and broadening the interest in family-friendly policies among workers.

A 2005 *Fortune* magazine survey shows that 84 percent of male executives at the largest U.S. companies want more time for things outside of work. "The first [men] with this interest are the dual-earners," says Bianchi.

Federal law allows up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for certain workers to take care of a sick family member or a new baby. It covers a little more than half the work force. When compared to other countries, "we have a reputation that we work a lot," says Bianchi.

Heather Boushey, an economist for the Center for Economic and Policy Research, says the employer-paid leave which some groups advocate could result in job discrimination against women of child-bearing age. She prefers a program enacted in 2004 in California, under which all workers (not just parents) are eligible for six weeks' partial pay leave. The program is paid for by workers.

In the near term, state and local experiments are more likely than new federal legislation. But the market also reacts to workers' needs, says Jeanie Duck, senior vice president at Boston Consulting Group. More companies are helping employees face "life situations." They give workers unpaid sabbaticals, temporary transfers to less-stressful jobs, and telecommuting options as well as assistance for spouses seeking jobs, she says.

Professionals juggle, Boushey says, but the real stress for dual-earner couples is among lower-income families, in which a husband might work a day shift and a wife, a night shift. "They might be with their children, but sleeping," she says, "which is not quality time."

Dual-earners just want a little time, Boushey believes. "We buy salad in a bag, we read magazine articles about getting more done in less time."



Elizabeth Kelleher is a USINFO staff writer.

Please share your views on this article. Write to editorspan@state.gov